

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

IAN ROBERT FORBES

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

PAINTING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

submitted by IAN ROBERT FORBES in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art.

The University of Alberta

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR IAN ROBERT FORBES TITLE OF
THESIS FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION DEGREE FOR
WHICH THESIS WAS GRANTED MASTER OF FINE ARTS
YEAR THIS DEGREE WAS GRANTED 1997

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DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE
" LAPRESSE: SHRINE	1996	MIXED	

From *Classical Mythology*, fourth edition

We shall not catalogue the gamut of Zeus' conquests here. . . . Two of his affairs are pertinent now for the universal significance of their progeny. Zeus mates with the Titaness Mnemosyne (Memory), who gives birth to the Muses, the patronesses of literature and the arts; thus allegorically Memory with divine help produces inspiration. Their home is often located in Pieria in northern Thessaly near Mount Olympus, or about the fountain Hippocrene on Mt. Helicon in Boeotia. The Muses (their name means "the Reminders") may originally have been water spirits with the power of prophecy and then inspiration, imagined from the babbling of waters as they flow. They are supreme in their fields, and those who dare to challenge them meet with defeat and punishment. In this respect they resemble Apollo, with whom they are often associated. The number of the Muses is not consistent, but later authors usually identify nine of them, with specific functions, although assignments will vary.

Calliope presides over epic poetry;
Clio, history (or lyre playing);
Euterpe, lyric poetry (or tragedy and flute playing);
Melpomene, tragedy (or lyre playing);
Terpsichore, choral dancing (or flute playing);
Erato, love poetry (or hymns to the gods and lyre playing);
Polyhymnia, sacred music (or dancing);
Urania, astronomy;
Thalia, comedy.

In the *Homeric Hymn to the Muses and Apollo*, the great deity Apollo is invoked along with them because as god of music, poetry, and the arts he is often their associate.

With the Muses, let be begin, and with Apollo and Zeus. For, through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo, men on earth are poets and musicians; but through Zeus, they are kings. Blessed are the ones whom the Muses love; sweet is the sound that flows from their lips. Hail, children of Zeus, and give honour to my song; yet I shall remember you and another song too.

Classical Mythology, fourth edition.
Mark P.O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon.
New York: Longman, 1991.

Slide List
Ian Forbes

MFA 1997

1. II LA PAPESSE: DRESS

1996: dress, wax, pigment, doors

2. OWL

1995: oil on panel

3. BLACK WING

1995: coat, wax, New York Times, pigment

4. BLACK WING — LOST IN THE FOREST

1995: wax, oil, wing, digital image, suitcase, shoes, carpet

5. III L'IMPERATRICE: REGINA MUNDI

1996: dress, wax, chairs, table, chaos generator, wire, bird's nest, acrylic on panel, lime, photocopy, globe, teeth

6. III L'IMPERATRICE: REGINA MUNDI (detail)

1996: dress, wax, chairs, table, chaos generator, wire, bird's nest, acrylic on panel, lime, photocopy, globe, teeth

7. III FEMININE ARCHETYPES OF INSPIRATION: HIPPOCRENE, FOUNTAIN OF THE SACRED MUSES

1996: wax, box, Mary nitelite, photocopy, acrylic on panel

8. JUDAS WALKS AT NIGHT

1996: mixed media on suit and end table

9. NIGHT

1995: cabinet, twigs, wax, glow-in-the-dark stars

10. COMING DOWN SHRINE — ONE TREE HILL

1994: oil, wax on suitcase, Jesus nitelite, wood, twigs, photocopy, photograph, gold leaf, plastic lamb and tree, cigar box, glow-in-the-dark stars, leaf, Christmas lights

11. COMING DOWN — YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD

1996: photocopy, gold/copper leaf, stove parts on panel, wax on plexiglass

12. II LA PAPESSE: SHRINE

1996: oil, wax, magpie on canvas, suitcase, end table, Mary nitelite, jars, nat

13. MNEMONIC EXTRACTOR

1996: table, lights, bottles, electronics

14. II LA PAPESSE

1996: photocopy, gold leaf, book, acrylic on panel and plexiglass

15. FALL — A FRAGMENT

1996: wax, steel wool, twigs, leaves, New York Times, shirt, pigment, asphaltum on panel

15. CLEM SAID...

Installation includes:

CLEM SAID – YOU GOTTA HAVE BIG BALLS TO FILL THESE SHOES

1995: enamel, acrylic, latex on canvas shoes, balls, plastic donkeys, styrofoam, sawdust

CLEM SAID – MISTAH GREENBERG, HE DEAD

1996: photocopy, wax, oil on plexiglass

CLEM SAID – THE RAT TRAP OF FRENCH MODERNISM

1996: Acoustically sensitive motorized rubber fish, lucifer rat trap on panel

CLEM SAID – FORMALISM

1995: altered book

CONDENSED HISTORY OF MODERN ART 1st EDITION

1995: essence of J.H.M.A., muriatic acid in three bottles

CONDENSED HISTORY OF MODERN ART 2nd EDITION, (with colour plates)

1996: essence of J.H.M.A., muriatic acid in two bottles

ACID TEST OF ART HISTORY APPLICATOR

1996: fire extinguisher, computer generated label, zip tie

TEST YOUR VISION

1995-96: aesthetically sensitive surface, thermally activated measuring device, photocopy transfer, computer generated label.

16 CLEM SAID — YOU GOTTA WAIT FOR THE ACID TEST OF ART HISTORY: MODERNIST TRACES

(CLEM SAID installation detail)

July 1996: Jansen's History of Modern Art in muriatic acid, fish tank, photocopy.

CLEM SAID — YOU GOTTA HAVE THE EYE

(CLEM SAID installation detail)

1996: photocopy on plexiglass, wing, eye glasses on wall paper

17. THE CAFE MNEMOSYNE

1996: couches, rug, fish table, mantel and fire, books, artworks, etc.

Installation includes:

SQUIRREL

1995: wax, twigs, pigment, plastic squirrel, acrylic on canvas

THE MYTHIC RESONATOR

1996: cabinet, hotplate, wax, glow-in-the-dark stars

CHEZ MUSE

1996: assorted studio extracts, postcards, drawings, notes, photographs in suitcase on stool, studio walls (tentest), cover of catalogue Sacred and Profane in Symbolist Art

BARNETT AT EMMA LAKE

1996: photocopy, wax, oil on plexiglass

UNCLE GEORGE'S COUCH

1994: couch.

LISA'S COUCH

1995: couch

LION HEART BURN

1996: photocopy, acrylic, coffee, oil on paper; plaster lion head

KEY

1993: polychrome metal key

MNEMONIC DEVICES

no date: photographs

UNCLES

1996: photocopy transfer on paper and panel, binoculars, acrylic on panel, photocopy transfer on plexiglass

RUG

no date: rug (portwood collection)

FIREPLACE

1994: electric fire, antique mantel, candles, bottles, Charlie's base

FISH TABLE

1995: coffee table, Denis' pike

LAMP

1993: lamp

COW SKULL

1983: cow skull

BEAVER

1992: stuffed beaver, tree stump, fabric

OWL

1992: stuffed owl, branch, oil, panel

CAT

1995: unknown

GLOBE

1994: globe, light

CAFE TRACES — DEFENCE PERFORMANCE

1997: remains of oral defence: coffee cups, lattés, champagne bottle, cups, eight cents, cigar box, books, oven parts, plastic apple, cork, on FISH TABLE

19. THE CAFE MNEMOSYNE

1996: couches, rug, fish table, mantel and fire, books, artworks, etc.

20. THE CAFE MNEMOSYNE

1996: couches, rug, fish table, mantel and fire, books, artworks, etc.



IAN FORBES

CAFE MNEMOSYNE

m f a g r a d u a t i o n s h o w

by Bo Lundin

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Rosa Luxemburg Gallery I would like to extend our thanks to those who contributed to this exhibition and publication. The artist, Ian Forbes, was enthusiastic and helpful during all phases of the project. His assistance directly influenced the nature of the exhibition. Amongst those who assisted were Bo Lundin, Jim Trevelyan, Colleen Skidmore, John Freeman, Denis Gautier, Clint Wilson, Bruce Dunbar, Jeske Sybesma, Bruce Grenville, David Wagner, Blair Brennan, Fiona Portwood, Darryl Rydman, Shelley Wilson, Lisa Hall, and BJ Forbes.

Finally, we would like to thank the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the University of Alberta for their financial support which made this exhibition possible.

Monika Holm, November 1996

Director/Curator

Rosa Luxemburg Gallery

IAN FORBES

CAFEMNEMOSYNE

m f a g r a d u a t i o n s h o w

January 7 – 19, 1997
Fine Arts Building Gallery
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

by Bo Lundin



1997 ©



RB: How do you feel about the state of art in Edmonton?

PH: It's like an outcrop of hard volcanic rock that's survived when every thing else has been eroded away.

RB: What I want to know is ... where are all the young painters, and particularly where are the new painters here in Edmonton?

TK: What I find disturbing is that the younger painters are not attracted to good painting. They're attracted to poor painting. In sculpture I see people inspired by the best of what they see and they're trying to measure up. In painting, though, I just don't see that happening. It concerns me. Clem once said that art can very well die out if it's not supported.

Russell Bingham, Peter Hide, Terrence Keller.

The Edmonton Review

Spring – Summer 1995.

Where have all the new painters gone — indeed. The work in this exhibition is the work of a “new painter”. It is presented here to satisfy the requirements of a master's degree in fine arts (painting). The world in which we live demands proof based on the authority of text: documents of observed phenomenon, catalogues of facts, testimonies, scientific evidence, explanations and definitions. This exhibition is a step in such a certification. We accept this situation almost as a matter of course and seem to have a limitless faith in the “miracle of modern science”. But, underneath our clinical detachment there

lurks half a million years of instinct and memory. Ian Forbes' work is an excavation of that well of memory. Forbes interrogates aspects of the modern, with science being the paradigm of modern experience, using memory as inquisitor. In the scientific world memory as witness is no longer trusted. Memory expands and contracts — it is too personal to be empirical. Perception, however, depends on memory (some even argue that perception is memory) and art depends on perception. In this way memory and art are intertwined; it is no wonder that the ancients called memory the mother of the muses.

Vision and Memory

Ian Forbes challenges his memory to transcend the limits of banal modern existence (*ex tedium modernum*). It is his project to remember beyond the self — through the filter of empathy — and face the Other, both past and future. The “Other” is both internal and external. It encompasses the unknowable ego outside the self, in Swedish *Framling* (the stranger), and the unfathomed depths inside the self, *Varelese* (the beast). The objects in this exhibition encapsulate and document measures of Otherness. These objects possess their own histories, stories that may be guessed

but not known, not quantified. Memory is both key and lock. Materials used in Forbes’ work also have conflicting natures. Acid dissolves one book; while another is encapsulated in a museum-style case. Wax cocoons objects and obliterates the paintings beneath. In this way memory is scarified. Then the wound is gouged out to reveal what is underneath. In another piece wax gives an old coat substance and form, turns old newspaper into wings. The wax is a medium, an alchemical agent between the self and the Other and a vehicle for metamorphosis.

Forbes seems to want to deny the painting tradition. In his statement for *Project: Loose Canons* Forbes goes out of his way to define himself outside the tradition of painting by calling his work interdisciplinary. One suspects this is a strategy to avoid dialogue with the formal traditions at his university. However, the work is grounded in the Modern and follows in the tradition of dada, fluxus, post-conceptual neo-romanticism, etc. Various aspects of The Modern World come into his expanded field of activity. Objects, paint, text, all have an equivalent weight in Forbes’ work. Greenberg and formalism, the Holocaust, the space race, religion, myth — the artist combines these with his own history to create a personal system of symbols and meaning, inducing, on some deeper level, a mythic resonance in the viewer. Rather than didactic, the result is discursive, revealing aspects of modernity in all its grandeur and horror.





III L'IMPERATRICE REGINA MUNDI (detail), 1996 dress, wax, chairs, table,
chaos generator, wire, bird's nest, acrylic on panel, lime, photocopy, globe, teeth



MNEMONIC EXTRACTOR,
1996: table, lights, bottles,
electronics

The artist's engagement with the Other provokes an ecstatic fragmentation of the self. Through memory and empathy the artist tries to reconcile the interior with the exterior. During the evocation of a forgotten face — the photograph of a dead woman in the painting *Black Wing – Lost In the Forest* — we journey back to find the traces of the Other. Forbes uses these remains — the discarded relics and the faded photographs — to extract and preserve their memories. He feels

a need for romantic beauty, but questions both his ability to produce it and the viewer's capacity to endure it.

In this state of ecstatic fragmentation the artist uses base elements of the Modern world (clothes, mass produced objects and images, excerpts from scientific papers, architectural drawings, maps, plans, books, catalogues of fact, etc.) to alchemically integrate the Self and the Other externally in the objects he assembles.

Decoding the Café Mnemosyne

What is memory? What is inspiration? What is art? These questions underlie most of Forbes' practice. He draws his inspiration from outside himself. It precipitates in the form of objects and images collected over a period of years. His artistic process is painfully slow. Images and objects are collected, collaged and assembled, then taken apart, only to be reconfigured in a totally different way. Forbes is never satisfied to leave things alone, he obsessively layers — metaphorically and literally.

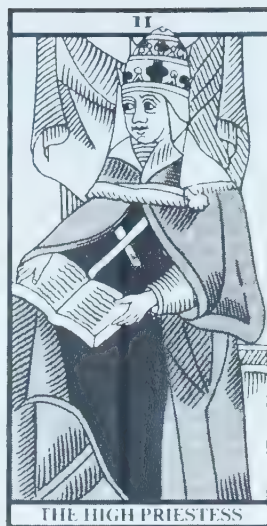
The layering of personal symbol, history, myth, image and object makes a reading of the *Café Mnemosyne* difficult. Decoding such a discursive text would not be practical or desirable. However, as an introduction to Forbes' work, it may be desirable to briefly decipher one piece — *Il La Papesse: the Sacred Muses* — in a gilded frame on plexiglass obscuring a photograph and a book, is a fragment of John Keats' 1819 poem *Hyperion*:

"Mnemosyne!

Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how;
Why should I tell thee what thou so well seest?
Why should I strive to show what from thy lips
Would come no mystery? For me, dark, dark,
And painful vile oblivion seals my eyes:
I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,
Until a melancholy numbs my limbs;
And then upon the grass I sit, and moan,
Like one who once had wings—

O tell me, lonely Goddess, by thy harp,
That wailth every morn and eventide,
Tell me why thus I rave, about these groves!
Mute thou remainest — mute! yet I can read
A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal."

Beneath the frame, on a small wooden shelf, is a small white cup and saucer. The *II La Papesse* in the title refers to the second card of the major arcana in the Tarot: the high priestess or popess. This piece is a revision of the traditional form of this card. Traditionally the card depicts a woman in some sort of regalia, enthroned, holding an open book. The high priestess is the most powerful of the female archetypes, symbolizing (in this case, because the artist is male) the feminine side of the male psyche. She embodies the anima, memory, hidden power and aspects of Mary, Sophia, Astarte, Ishtar and Isis. In Forbes' version, the traditional image of the priestess is replaced by a photograph of a woman (his great aunt) and a dog (Burkie). Beneath the photograph there is an old note book, which contains the greek vocabulary of



The Popess (Marseilles Deck) and a circa 1920 photograph of Muriel and Burkie: feminine archetypes of inspiration.



a student at McGill University in 1924. This layering — Forbes' personal history over the tarot card symbolism — creates a talisman evoking that archetypical figure which inspires the artist and taps the collective unconscious: the muse. The elements are personal and playful, reflecting a complex meditation on the nature of memory and inspiration.

— Bo Lundin, 1996



JUDAS WALKS AT NIGHT, 1996: mixed media on suit and end table

o

Curriculum Vitae

Education:

- 1997 University of Alberta, MFA
(Art and Design)
Edmonton, Alberta.
(Thesis Show Jan 1997).
- 1991 University of Alberta, BFA
(Art and Design)
Edmonton, Alberta.
- 1988 Grande Prairie Regional College
University Transfer Program, Fine Arts
Grande Prairie, Alberta.

Exhibitions:

- 1996 Ex officio.
Edmonton, The Works Festival
(invited), Commerce Place, Group
Show.
- 1995 Object Realities.
Edmonton, Edmonton Art Gallery,
Group Show. Catalogue.
- 1995 How Does It Smell?
Third Annual Member's Show.
Edmonton, Latitude 53 Gallery,
Group show.
- 1995 Visual Gaming.
Works selected from Graduate
Seminar 654. The Works Festival
Manulife Place, Juried Group Show.

- 1995 Project Loose Canons:
Post-modernizing the Prairie
Abstractionists.
Rosa Luxemburg Gallery. University
of Alberta. Solo. Catalogue.
- 1994 Photography is Dead.
Edmonton, The Works Festival
Grant MacEwan City Centre
Campus, Group show.
- 1994 The Photo Based Show.
Edmonton, Banana Galleries —
Greenwood's Bookstore, Group
Show.
- 1994 My Dog Has No Nose
The Second Annual Members Show
Edmonton, Latitude 53 Gallery,
Group show.
- 1994 Transposition: Optical Producers
in Collaboration.
Provincial Extension Program
touring exhibition from the Southern
Alberta Art Gallery. Invitational
Group Show — Toured through
1996. Catalogue.
- 1994 The Small Art Exhibition.
Edmonton, Edmonton Art Gallery,
Art Rental and Sales Gallery,
Group Show.

Awards

- 1996 Graduate Teaching Assistantship — second semester (Art 131).
- 1995 Graduate Research Assistantship — first semester (FAB Gallery).
- 1995/ 1996 AFA Graduate Scholarship (painting).

Permanent Collections:

Private Collections.

Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection.

Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Krematorium IV Memorial.

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland.

(Commissioned by the Auschwitz Awareness Society, 1990.)

Professional Experience:

1991–1994

The Edmonton Art Gallery

Preparator/Carpenter

Preparing works of art and art objects for display. In performing my duties at the EAG, I came into close contact with some of Canada's top artists and curators. The exposure to them and their work was a crucial part of my development as an artist.

1994

The New Media Forum Grant MacEwan Community College.

Experimental workshop in emerging image technology (computer based digital still imaging) held weekly in the Advanced Media Lab at Grant MacEwan. The workshop was designed to promote and encourage work in new media.
By invitation.

Selected Publications:

Gautier, Denis, Object Realities. Catalogue, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, 1996.
(electronic catalogue — in IBM or Mac).

Lundin, Bo (editor), Project: Loose Canons. Catalogue, Rosa Luxemburg Gallery, Edmonton, 1995. (revised edition 1996).

Wagner, David, Transposition: Optical Producers in Collaboration, pp. 4 -5, Catalogue, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, 1994.

List of Works

II LA PAPESSSE: DRESS, 1996: dress, wax, pigment, doors

OWL, 1995: oil on panel

BLACK WING, 1995: coat, wax, New York Times, pigment

BLACK WING – LOST IN THE FOREST, 1995: wax, oil, wing, digital image, suitcase, shoes, carpet

III L'IMPERATRICE: REGINA MUNDI, 1996: dress, wax, chairs, table, chaos generator, wire, bird's nest, acrylic on panel, lime, photocopy, globe, teeth

III HAWK, 1996: hawk, wax, photocopy, silver, acrylic on panel and plexiglass

III MUSE CUPBOARD, 1996: acrylic on shelf, photocopy, gold leaf, nine cups, nine saucers, lettraset

III FEMININE ARCHETYPES OF INSPIRATION: HIPPOCRENE, FOUNTAIN OF THE SACRED MUSES, 1996: wax, box, Mary nitelite, photocopy, acrylic on panel

JUDAS — ENDGAME, 1995: oil, window, photocopy, copper leaf, acrylic, pigment on panel

JUDAS WALKS AT NIGHT, 1996: mixed media on suit and end table

FOX, 1995: photocopy on transfer paper

COMING DOWN SHRINE — ONE TREE HILL, 1994: oil, wax on suitcase, Jesus nitelite, wood, twigs, photocopy, photograph, gold leaf, plastic lamb and tree, cigar box, glow-in-the-dark stars, leaf, Christmas lights

COMING DOWN — YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD, 1996: photocopy, gold/copper leaf, stove parts on panel, wax on plexiglass

FOX — ENDGAME, 1995: photocopy, oil, handmade paper on panel

II LA PAPESSSE: SHRINE, 1996: oil, wax, magpie on canvas, suitcase, end table, Mary nitelite, jars, hat

MNEMONIC EXTRACTOR, 1996: table, lights, bottles, electronics

II LA PAPESSSE, 1996: photocopy, gold leaf, book, acrylic on panel and plexiglass

CLEM SAID — YOU GOTTA HAVE BIG BALLS TO FILL THESE SHOES, 1995: enamel, acrylic, latex on canvas, shoes, balls, plastic donkeys, styrofoam, sawdust

CLEM SAID — YOU GOTTA HAVE THE EYE, 1996: photocopy on plexiglass, wing, eye glasses on wall paper

CLEM SAID — YOU GOTTA WAIT FOR THE ACID TEST OF ART HISTORY: MODERNIST TRACES JULY 1996: Jansen's History of Modern Art in muriatic acid, fish tank, photocopy

CONDENSED HISTORY OF MODERN ART 1st EDITION, 1995: essence of J.H.M.A., muriatic acid in three bottles

FALL — A FRAGMENT, 1996: wax, steel wool, twigs, leaves, New York Times, shirt, pigment, asphaltum on panel

SQUIRREL, 1995: wax, twigs, pigment, plastic squirrel, acrylic on canvas

UNCLE, 1996: photocopy, binoculars on panel

THE MYTHIC RESONATOR, 1996: cabinet, hotplate, wax, glow-in-the-dark stars

NIGHT, 1995: cabinet, twigs, wax, glow-in-the-dark stars

THE CAFE MNEMOSYNE, 1996: couches, rug, fish table, mantel and fire, books, artworks, etc.

CHEZ MUSE, 1996: assorted studio extracts, postcards, drawings, notes

OCULAR PAIN, 1996: photocopy, graphite, marker on 100% rag paper

BARNETT AT EMMA LAKE, 1996: photocopy, wax, oil on plexiglass

CLEM SAID – MISTAH GREENBERG, HE DEAD, 1996: photocopy, wax, oil on plexiglass



"Obviously, there are parts of the modernist ideology which have never fulfilled their contracts, others which no longer fulfill theirs now, and still more which have been so disfigured by successive adaptations to circumstances that they now appear too clearly in all their monstrosity."

Serge Guilbaut, *the Relevance of Modernism*, 1984.

rosa luxemburg
— gallery —

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